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Viewing cable 08MANAGUA297, ATLANTIC COAST ELECTION DELAYS COULD SPARK VIOLENCE

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08MANAGUA297**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MANAGUA297	2008-03-11 20:58	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758468.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3966/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-ee-uu-en-el-2006>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2758764.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2758753.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4040/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-venezuela-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4047/rodrigo-barreto-enviado-de-ldquo-vacaciones-rdquo>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2757239.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2746658.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2757244.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2746673.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3968/pellas-pronostico-a-eeuu-victoria-de-ortega-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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PP RUEHLMC
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P 112058Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2232
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 000297

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT PLS PASS TO USAID LAC
DEPT FOR WHA/CEN GREENE AND NYMAN
DEPT FOR DRL G. MAGGIO
DEPT FOR USOAS
NSC FOR V ALVARADO
SOUTHCOM FOR FPA
SOUTHCOM FOR J2 J3 J5
E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/05/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: ATLANTIC COAST ELECTION DELAYS COULD SPARK VIOLENCE

REF: MANAGUA 105

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli for reasons 1.4(b,d)

1 (C) SUMMARY: Residents in Nicaragua's North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) are sharply divided and close to violence over the possibility of elections being suspended because of Hurricane Felix damage in the municipalities of Puerto Cabezas, Waspam, and Prinzapolka. Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) magistrates traveled to Puerto Cabezas, RAAN on February 26 on a "fact finding" mission, but reportedly met only with anti-election supporters, including the Regional Council, which handed over a resolution in favor of suspension. On March 12, the CSE will present its recommendations to the National Assembly's Executive Committee. Although suspension legally requires an electoral law reform ratified by 56 deputies, pro-election deputies and supporters fear the CSE will judicially engineer suspension, effectively bypassing the National Assembly, to fend off a near-certain electoral loss for the indigenous Yatama party, a close ally of President Daniel Ortega. There are reports that Yatama is recruiting "shock troops" in the RAAN to intimidate voters and expel "mestizos" and pro-election supporters. END SUMMARY.

GON Seeks Excuses to Suspend Elections
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12. (SBU) On February 26, Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) President Roberto Rivas and magistrate Emmett Lang visited the RAAN capital of Puerto Cabezas to assess the region's preparedness to hold municipal elections in November 2008. Originally billed as a "fact finding" mission in November 2007 (reftel), Rivas and Lang allegedly met only with local Yatama officials allied with President Daniel Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), including the mayor of Puerto Cabezas, the RAAN's governor, and the Regional Council -- the highest governing body in the autonomous region. The Regional Council presented the CSE magistrates with a resolution requesting that elections be suspended in the RAAN municipalities of Puerto Cabezas, Waspam, and Prinzapolka on grounds that the physical and psychological damage caused by Hurricane Felix was too extensive to justify the contests. Further, the Council requested that funds earmarked for the elections be put towards reconstruction efforts.

13. (C) The Government of Nicaragua (GON) is also seeking a legal basis to suspend the elections. In conversation with USAID officials, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Valdrack Jaentschke cited as justification GON non-compliance with an Inter-American Human Rights Court (IAHRC) verdict won by Yatama following their exclusion from the 2000 elections. Jaentschke advised that elections in the RAAN would likely be postponed until the constitutional reforms mandated by the court had been implemented in order to avoid further international legal troubles. Javier Williams, a former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Bolanos government who is intimately familiar with this case, dismissed this assertion, insisting that the GON's non-compliance "had not stopped Yatama from running pro-FSLN candidates in the 2005 and 2006 elections" that brought National Assembly deputy Brooklyn Rivera and RAAN governor Reynaldo Francis to power.

Pro-Election Representatives Denied Access to CSE

14. (C) Aware of the CSE magistrates' visit, a group of pro-election leaders requested and were granted a meeting with Rivas and Lang to present a counter-petition in favor of elections. When the pro-election representatives arrived for their meeting, a Regional Council representative reportedly attempted to divide the group, authorizing only certain members to present the proposal. Instead of acquiescing, the group refused and left the premises without an audience with the magistrates. Separately, local religious leaders sought a meeting with Rivas and Lang to lobby for elections, but never received a response. (NOTE: The World Food Program's Country Director, in Puerto Cabezas at the time of the magistrates' visit, characterized the visit as "a private

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dinner party. They arrived in the late afternoon and went straight into a meeting for the rest of the evening." END NOTE)

A Growing Threat of Violence

15. (C) Multiple sources have warned us that there will be violence in the RAAN no matter what the final decision on elections in these three municipalities. There is mounting evidence to support this concern:

- The day before the CSE's visit, hundreds of Yatama supporters participated in a pro-suspension rally in Puerto Cabezas. Osorno "Blas" Coleman, a pro-election movement and indigenous leader, was roughed up after showing up at the rally with 80 supporters and demanding to speak.

- The day after the CSE visit, hundreds of pro-election supporters burned tires and took to the streets of Puerto Cabezas.

- Four days later, on Sunday, March 2, pro-election supporters staged marches in Puerto Cabezas and Waspam. Coleman estimated that over 1,000 people participated in Puerto Cabezas and 2,000 in Waspam. He recounted that marchers entered the city halls in both municipalities, allegedly removing the mayor of Waspam and threatening to burn down City Hall in Puerto Cabezas if elections were suspended. In a public statement following the marches, Yatama Governor Reynaldo Francis accused pro-election supporters of ransacking Yatama's party headquarters in Puerto Cabezas.

- In a published statement, the mayor of Puerto Cabezas and Francis openly threatened Sunday's march participants, declaring that the price for Sunday's actions would be "very expensive."

- Sources have reported that pro-FSLN members of Yatama have been forming what one contact dubbed "shock troops" in

communities throughout the RAAN to "take action" if elections go forward as planned in November. According to contacts, these groups are allegedly trying to persuade indigenous communities that elections in November would delay the region's recovery. To tangibly demonstrate what is at stake, these groups are said to be passing out school uniforms, books, pens/pencils, and livestock to the communities with the message that all such assistance would stop if elections are held. Further, these "shock troops" are said to be spreading the notion that the "mestizos" (non-indigenous immigrants from other parts of the country) are pushing for elections to keep the indigenous in conditions of poverty, thereby allowing the mestizos to "continue taking advantage of them." If elections are held, these shock troops are threatening to forcibly remove mestizos and pro-election indigenous residents from the RAAN.

CSE Set to Meet with National Assembly
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¶6. (C) The National Assembly Executive Committee will meet with CSE magistrates Rivas and Lang on March 12 to discuss the Regional Council's proposal to delay elections. Under Nicaraguan law, changing an election date requires electoral law reform, a legislative move that requires a minimum of 56 votes in the National Assembly. Convinced that the FSLN cannot garner enough votes to approve such a change, Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) National Assembly deputy Victor Duarte -- the most vocal advocate in favor of elections -- confided that he fears the Ortega government will try to push the suspension through the CSE or some other mechanism without consulting with the National Assembly. Duarte reported that he is advocating for a new National Assembly committee to conduct an independent study of electoral conditions in the RAAN prior to the March 12 meeting to ensure the "Executive Committee has a balanced picture of the RAAN's environment." Duarte also expressed concern over rumors that the CSE intends to discreetly reconfigure voting jurisdictions to fragment Liberal voter bases in key

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municipalities and bolster FSLN registeries. A Conservative Party (PC) leader told us on March 10 that the CSE plans to seek a judicial ruling upholding the Regional Council's right to suspend the elections under the country's regional autonomy law (Law 28), thereby effectively bypassing the National Assembly altogether.

Comment
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¶7. (C) The RAAN is a tumultuous region, where isolated protests and disturbances occasionally erupt due to underlying political and racial tension that simmers just below the surface. It is a population that feels neglected, forgotten, and often exploited by national and regional governments. However, up until now the residents' right to vote has never been threatened. There is deep concern that the Ortega government will engineer an election suspension to avoid almost certain electoral losses in Puerto Cabezas, Waspam, and Prinzapolka. As a result, our sources warn us of potential widespread intimidation and violence regardless of the final decision on the status of elections. They claim the FSLN and their Yatama allies are actively recruiting enforcers to intimidate voters and carry out mass expulsions and other 9DOQ,ELLI